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FM REO BASRAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0398
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUCNRAO/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0001
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY PRIORITY 0001
RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0417

C O N F I D E N T I A L BASRAH 000111

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TAGS: PHUM PREF PREL PNAT KDEM SMIG IZ JO SY

SUBJECT: BASRAH MANDAEAN LEADER EXPRESSES SERIOUS CONCERNS

REF: (A) BASRAH 031 (B) BAGHDAD 1924

CLASSIFIED BY: Kenneth E. Gross, Regional Coordinator, Basrah Regional Embassy Office, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶11. (C) On June 29, the Regional Coordinator (RC) met with the spiritual leader of the Basrah Mandaean community, Shaykh Raad Gbashi at his request. Shaykh Raad is a contact of the Regional Embassy Office (see Ref A) and has met previously with the RC. At this meeting, Shaykh Raad said that his community is under pressure from criminal and terrorist gangs who were taking advantage of the vulnerability and passive nature of the small Mandaean community to get their hands on their wealth. According to Shaykh Raad, on June 28 armed gangs in pick-up trucks opened fire on the Mandaean house of worship in Basrah. No one was injured, and the Iraqi police failed to capture the assailants or provide adequate protection for his congregation. He also recounted several cases of Mandaean families being harassed, robbed and killed.

¶12. (C) Shaykh Raad estimated there are only about 250 Mandaean families, approximately 1,000 people, left in Basrah, a decrease from a total of about 20,000 before the fall of Saddam. However, during the past several years, more and more Mandaean families have left for Syria, Jordan and other countries. According to Shaykh Raad, in the last two weeks 12 Mandaean families from Basrah have fled to Syria via Iran. He added that throughout Iraq, a total of 1,500 Mandaean families have fled to Syria and 500 to Jordan.

¶13. (C) Shaykh Raad stated that he was now considering moving the entire Basrah Mandaean community to the north of Iraq where it was more peaceful. He said that the Mandaearns would be welcomed in the north because they were wealthy and could provide much needed investment in the province. However, Shaykh Raad said there was also the possibility of Mandaean families moving to Syria or Amman where they could live or have the opportunity to seek resettlement to Europe, Australia or Canada. He lamented that the Mandaean community had to consider moving since Basrah has been their home for the past 7,000 years.

¶14. (C) Comment: Clearly the small Mandaean community is coming under pressure from the poor security situation in Basrah. Their plight appears to mirror that of other Mandaean communities in Iraq (see ref B). As Shaykh Raad stated, it truly would be a loss for the rich cultural heritage of Basrah if the Mandaean community decides they must move in order to survive. End Comment.

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